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Approved For Release 2003/07/30 : CIA-RDP73B00296R000300060027-4

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

April 13, 1971

Dear Mr. Helms:

The traffic in hard narcotics, the opium derivatives, is among the most insidious and deadly threats to our domestic safety and well-being.

These drugs destroy hundreds of thousands of lives each year, and the number is growing rapidly. Beyond that, hard drug addiction authors a vast proportion of all other crime--as much as 90 percent in New York City, for example--which is committed by users seeking funds to sustain their habits. A recent study in the District of Columbia found that 45 percent of a sampling of the D.C. jail population was addicted to heroin.

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This general grave concern is now coupled with the more recent problem of hard drug addiction acquired by United States servicemen returning from Indochina. The Commissioner of New York's Addiction Services Agency has written to me that,

"Most recent reports on drug addiction and drug abuse do indicate that there is an increase in these phenomena among American servicemen and there is very little doubt that a significantly greater part of New York servicemen returning to civilian life have been or are addicted, or have developed a propensity to addiction."

Dr. Robert DuPont, director of Washington D.C.'s Narcotics Treatment Administration, reports that his agency has undertaken a systematic study of the relationship between military service and heroin use. He told me recently that,

Page Two

"Our earlier investigations showed that about 25 percent of the heroin addict patients in treatment with the Narcotics Treatment Administration, and about 25 percent of the heroin addicts admitted to the D.C. jail, are veterans."

Last year the Veterans Administration established the treatment of drug dependence as a special medical program, including plans for 30 specialized units for the rehabilitation of drug dependent veterans. V.A. Administrator Donald Johnson has advised me that his agency is not in a position to assess the true magnitude of this problem.

In his State of the World Message, President Nixon quite properly singled out plans to deal with the international sources of supply of heroin as an essential, central element in any serious effort to control this vicious drug. He indicated that the Administration has worked closely with a number of governments, particularly Turkey, France, and Mexico, to seek an end to illicit production and smuggling of narcotics.

On the basis of this background, I am deeply disturbed by reports, including those contained in the current issue of Ramparts Magazine, that the vast majority of all heroin production comes not from Turkey, not from France or Mexico, but from Southeast Asia, and that U.S. policy and personnel, instead of discouraging this traffic, have actually assisted its growth.

I would very much appreciate your comments on the following points raised in the enclosed article:

- (1) The report that, according to the United Nations Commission on Drugs and Narcotics, at least 80 percent of the world's 1200 tons of illicit opium comes from Southeast Asia. According to an Iranian report to a United Nations seminar on the subject, some 83 percent of the world's illegal supply originates in the Fertile Triangle region which includes parts of Burma, northern Thailand and Laos.

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Page Three

- (2) The report that Nationalist Chinese or Kuomingtang forces operating in that region control and profit from the opium trade, that these forces supplement their income by performing missions for the United States, and that the Burmese government has protested this activity both to the United States and the United Nations.
- (3) The report that opium is the basic source of income for Meo tribesmen in Laos, and that General Vang Pao, commander of Lao counterinsurgency forces made up of Meo tribesmen and supported by the United States, uses aircraft supplied by this country to transport opium from the surrounding area to the base of Long Cheng.
- (4) The report that General Ouane Rathikoune of the Royal Laotian Army exercises broad control over the opium traffic in Laos, including ownership of several "cookers" for refining it, and that he and other interested parties transport raw opium in equipment supplied by the United States military assistance program.
- (5) The implication that opium production and collection in Laos is conducted with the knowledge of Central Intelligence Agency officials, particularly in the area surrounding Long Cheng, and that CIA operations there actually serve to protect these supplies and facilitate their movement.
- (6) The report that high Vietnamese officials, including Vice President Ky, have been and may currently be involved in the transport of opium from the Fertile Triangle region to Saigon and in its distribution there.

Certainly these reports, along with others in the article, warrant a thorough investigation. Indeed, considering our determination to end the menace of heroin addiction in this country, I will be surprised if such an investigation has not already been completed and if we are not currently

Page Four

involved in vigorous diplomatic efforts to close off this source. Considering the number of independent sources which have reported knowledge of vast opium production in the Fertile Triangle region, it seems to me that it would be impossible for it to escape the attention of U.S. agencies operating there.

Along with your comments on the points listed above I would, therefore, very much appreciate a report on initiatives the United States has undertaken to cut off this major source of opium supply, including any restrictions on military assistance aimed at preventing the use of American equipment in collecting and transporting this treacherous commodity.

Sincerely,


George McGovern

Honorable Richard Helms, Director
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C. 20505